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AUTHOR Gehl, Julie; Karl, Rebecca
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ABSTRACT

These nonfiction, first-hand accounts of the experiences of two young women sojourning in foreign countries offer insights into the cultural adjustments, problems, and rewards foreign exchange students may encounter. A Danish woman recounts her difficulty in readjusting to her home country following a year in Kenya, emphasizing the cultural and emotional conflict she felt in relearning her native country's customs concerning student-teacher relationships, parent-child interaction, and public displays of affection. Problems and challenges encountered as a member of a white minority in a black nation are also discussed. An American woman reminisces about the difficulties she encountered when she visited the home of her Taiwanese boyfriend for the New Year, an important traditional Taiwanese holiday. Efforts to learn foreign language and customs, to be accepted by the people of a provincial village, and to deal with ridicule and constant surveillance are among the issues discussed. (LP)

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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE OF AFS INTERNATIONAL

AFS volunteers and professional staff throughout the world are moving towards the goal of peace by stimulating an awareness of mankind's common humanity, a wider understanding of the diverse cultures of the world, and a concern for the global issues confronting society. They acknowledge that peace is a dynamic concept threatened by injustices both between and within nations.

In pursuit of this goal, the core of the AFS experience has been the promotion of relationships in which families, communities, groups and maturing young persons from different cultural backgrounds share new learning situations related to the purposes of AFS. In addition, through experience and experimentation, AFS has developed and continues to encourage new models and opportunities for exchange that will be beneficial for the development of society.

AFS does not affiliate with any religious, political or partisan group, but it believes in the value of participating in a continuous process of interaction between cultures both across and within boundaries.

AFS encourages all participants to involve themselves in situations in which they can apply and project their AFS experience.

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INTRODUCTION

This *Occasional Paper* introduces a different literary style into our series -- non-fictional, first-person accounts of intercultural sojourners. We believe that narratives of this type have as much to offer those of us committed to intercultural learning as do the more academic analyses that we have published in the past, and will continue to publish in the future. Our intention is to publish a first-person account of an intercultural experience in every third or fourth issue of the *Papers* from now on.

But I Am Danish (?) is by a young Danish woman who participated in an AFS Year Program to Kenya during 1979-1980. Julie Gehl is now a third-year medical student in Copenhagen and an active AFS volunteer whose special interest is in promoting North-South dialogue. Julie recently was one of three Danish volunteers responsible for beginning AFS's Ghana Teachers Program. She also is involved with other organizations committed to development work and to North-South dialogue.

"A-doka" is by a young U.S. woman who, on her own, went to live in Taiwan in 1980 and remained there until early this year. Rebecca Karl is now an assistant in the LACAP division of AFS International here in New York. A graduate of Barnard College, she is fluent in French and Russian as well as in Mandarin, which she learned in Taiwan. Rebecca is a valuable asset to AFS whenever groups from these language areas visit the U.S. under AFS auspices.

Those who have been on our mailing list for some time might notice a slight change in the format and appearance of this sixth *Occasional Paper*. The explanation for the change is that the two articles were typed and printed out on AFS's new Wang word processor.

BUT I AM DANISH (?)

Julie Gehl
AFS Volunteer
Copenhagen, Denmark

"But I am Danish!" I switch to Danish this time, hoping that will convince her. But I find my accent unbearable.

"Oh, I see. But how long have you actually stayed in Denmark?"

"Sixteen years . . . and then I've stayed one year here."

"I beg your pardon?"

I repeat my words, trying to articulate more carefully.

"You're joking!" She stares at me in disbelief.

"No, I'm not joking. I am Danish, and I lived in Denmark for sixteen years."

That day in Nairobi's airport, I supposedly was going home to where I belonged. The trouble was that I didn't really belong there any more. Claiming to be Danish was somehow only half the truth . . . or rather, if I was Danish, I wasn't as much as I had been. I did not want to go home. I felt I belonged in Africa. I was very uncertain about what was going to happen when I reached my destination. I felt as though I had forgotten my language, my background, my culture.

But my troubles were only beginning. I had thought about how I would meet them when we arrived in Copenhagen. I would walk over and give each one a hug. This is what you do in Denmark -- but it is not what you do in Kenya. Finally, I saw them standing behind the glass shield in the airport. There were fifteen people with big overcoats and Danish flags. I must have looked a bit funny to them; I was dressed differently from what they were used to and I was carrying a big basket on my head. It was very difficult for me to express myself in Danish at all. My accent was quite noticeable, and three months passed before people stopped asking me where I came from.

My first days at home I found truly shocking. I experienced my family doing things that I thought could not be done; I saw unbelievable situations take place at school; I felt that everything had been turned upside-down, as in a nightmare. Nobody followed the rules that I stuck to.

(continued on page 4)

"A-DOKA"

Rebecca Karl
AFS Staff Member
New York, New York

Taiwan, January 1981

All businesses were closing for at least four days. Everyone was getting swept up into a frenzy of activity — those at home preparing for the family members to arrive, those living away preparing for the long trip home. Cooking and cleaning started many days in advance for the hosts, but for the travelers the main concern was the logistics of transportation. It was the beginning of the Lunar New Year, the biggest holiday of the year.

In the traditional Chinese manner of starting off the New Year with family members, my friend and I were going to the South for the festivities. We frequently discussed plans for getting from Taipei, in the North, to the country side. But several days before the eve, every train ticket had been bought, lines for bus tickets stretched for blocks around the station, and airplane tickets were unavailable. I was convinced we'd be left behind. "There is a way," everyone kept telling me. And truly, on the last day, when panic began to sweep over my friend, a car suddenly was found, repaired, packed, and set on the road leading South. We were not the only ones who had found this last-minute solution, and a drive that should have taken four hours took closer to seven.

This was not only my first Lunar New Year, but also my debut as the foreign girlfriend at my friend's house. My last months had been filled with study of the tradition and customs of the festival. I had learned all the polite congratulatory phrases in Mandarin as well as in the two major dialects of Taiwan. The complex system of titles and names by which to address relatives and friends finally were becoming clear. In fact, for the past two weeks, I had continually asked my friend for hints about his parents' quirks, likes, and dislikes. He replied as well as he could, but having grown up with them, he could not understand the source of my deep concern and anxiety.

He warned me: "Mama expects the women to get up at least an hour before the men. When you get up, help her in the kitchen, wash the dirty clothing, and set the table. My sister-in-law will be up, too, but she will be busy. If you don't understand Mama's dialect, try to talk with your hands. She understands a little Mandarin, but not much. Try to learn dialect so you can talk with her."

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Perhaps because I was supposed to have come home, I actually had expected them to stick to my rules. I had anticipated having readjustment difficulties, but not a world of difference between my norms and theirs. My rules were African, theirs were Danish. A serious conflict was bound to arise.

"Shut up!"

I choke and look at my sister in utter disbelief, almost dropping the spoon into my soup.

My sister just said "Shut up!" to my mother!

I can't believe my own ears. This is so rude that it almost seems physically impossible. You just can't say that to your mother. Since I am her big sister, it is my duty to intervene. But what do they do in Denmark? I try to remember, but I can't recall. Should I slap her? Should I drag her outside the room and give her the scolding of her life? But before I move into action, I get a worse shock. Nobody else reacted to what happened! A serious offense just occurred and they didn't even bat an eyelid. I sit back confused and frustrated.

After three days in Copenhagen I was completely run down. My two nights in the basement room, where I normally slept, felt like spending two nights in a tomb. The silence was roaring and seemed deadly in comparison with the lively dormitory at my Kenyan school as well as with the room where I always slept with my Kenyan sister during the holidays. My three days were filled with horrors of all sorts; everywhere I went, things were strange. When it was time to go to sleep in the tomb for the third night in a row, I couldn't help crying even though I tried not to. It seemed a useless thing to do. Nobody would be able to help because they were not in a position to understand why things were so difficult. It seemed an impossible task to explain what Kenya had been like, and why I thought everyone in Denmark was behaving rather oddly. My father tried to help. Although he did not understand everything, he did appreciate that I had a problem with sleeping in the basement. So he kindly suggested that we could do just what we'd done when I had been scared at night as a little girl: I could sleep in my parents' room. I was so run down at this point that I meekly acquiesced. But when I awoke the next morning, I felt more out of place than ever before. That a grown-up girl would sleep in her parents' bedroom just did not seem proper to me.

I had thought that going to school would help me by giving me some work to put my mind to. As I went over to report at school, I encountered a teacher I knew quite well. It was not strange (from a Danish point of view) for this teacher to give me a hug and invite me to have a chat about Kenya over a beer. I endured the hug. But I refused the beer -- this was past the limit!

Then in class the other students screamed and shouted, called the teacher by his first name, debated vigorously if they disagreed with something he had said. It took me two weeks to get my eyes lifted from the floor when speaking to a teacher. In the school's yearbook I am described as "the weak voice from Africa."

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When I think back to the time before I departed for Kenya, stories such as these become even more amusing. I had matured quite early, and began a massive revolt against my parents at about the age of 12. "Shut up" actually is mild in comparison with the things I previously had said to my mother. Just after turning 14, I became aware that there are many things amiss in this world, so I began political work in the peace and anti-nuclear movements. I did not fear to stand up in front of several hundred people to tell them what I thought was right. The authorities didn't scare me in the least. I worked hard writing letters to various editors and articles for both local and national newspapers. I arranged demonstrations, meetings, happenings, and what have you. At my high school I was active in the students' council and the school board, and I was not intimidated by the possibility of running into conflicts with the teachers. Had somebody told me then that in less than two years I would be dressed in a school uniform, confined to a girls' boarding school, deprived of the need to make any decisions -- and actually would be liking it -- I would have thought he was mad. One day I told the director of the AFS office in Kenya that I would like to work for AFS someday. He replied, "No, no, Julia, you're much too soft!" But I don't blame him for saying that -- he knew me only in my Kenyan setting.

It became clear to me that my behavior and norms had changed quite drastically as a result of my stay in Kenya. The dimensions of my life in which I had changed the most concerned relationships between adults and children, authority figures and subordinates, and especially men and women. The two sexes have fairly separate worlds in Kenya, and the distance between them is emphasized in the relationships between men and women. On the other hand, the relationships between sisters and between girls generally is much stronger than in Denmark. Because of this, my stay in Kenya gave me a much stronger sense of female identity, which was reflected in my attitudes toward people in Denmark. I could be more open and confident with women, but sometimes quite shy in the presence of men.

I changed so much while living in Kenya because I had tried to integrate myself into Kenyan culture and society as much as I possibly could. In fact, I had gone as far as almost denouncing my nationality. The reason why I felt it necessary to go that far was -- apart from the big culture gap -- the color of my skin.

Racism occurs all over the world. But it plays a crucial role in a country like Kenya, which until quite recently had been subjected to decades of European colonialism. Racism in Africa is closely connected to the economic injustices that pervade that continent. When the problem is that the rich -- who usually are white -- exploit and suppress the poor -- who always are black -- class struggle and racism become intermingled. It seems to me as though there are two camps, a white community and an African community, and that an invisible wall separates the two. There are some Africans in the white community and some whites in the African community, but not very many in either case. The extent of the division became evident to me in two ways. First, I realized how unusual it seemed to people that I, a white person, was not staying in the white community. Second, I became aware of how grave was the lack of understanding on the part of whites of the African culture and heritage. What I found in Kenya were two worlds within one nation. One was based on the African heritage, the other on an imported European heritage. Activities that are commonplace in one of these worlds do not take place in the other because of economic as well as cultural differences. Politically, of course, the two worlds have been opposed to each other throughout recent history.

It may seem strange -- in the beginning it seemed strange to me -- that the two groups are not more integrated. But the white community has its roots solidly planted in colonial times, and does not seem interested in change. Even many development workers identify with the white community. They arrive with a background that, economically and socially and culturally, has far more in common with the white community than with the African community, and they tend to be absorbed into the former. As soon as one is part of the white community, one is quite vulnerable in terms of becoming alienated from the African community. And because situations in which the two communities meet on a positive and equal basis are extremely scarce, there is very little reason for the wall between them to break down. Just as knots don't occur for no reason, they certainly don't untie themselves either!

A widespread misconception in the Western world is that colonialism is over, that development aid has started, and that poverty is diminishing. The truth is that the Third World is poorer than ever and that exploitation has entered an even more efficient era. It is also a misconception that racial divisions are breaking down. The truth is that many development experts walk straight into the role of the former colonialists; they become quite racist under the influence of the other whites in Kenya. In fact, <u>any</u> white person arriving in Kenya must expect to be put into a very stereotypical role . . . until he or she manages to prove that that role does not fit. This sometimes is quite a task.

Even though this state of affairs was emphasized almost daily during my year in Kenya, it took me almost three months to recognize fully how extreme were the divisions between the two camps. Perhaps I was reluctant to recognize the extent to which the Africans hold stereotyped impressions

of whites. Perhaps I simply couldn't believe that the attitude among many Kenyan whites toward the African community was as disgusting as it was.

Understanding that all this is so raises a number of questions for a white exchange student in Kenya. Whose side are you on? If you decide to try to identify yourself with the African community, your skin is going to betray you. How far do you want to go in trying to demonstrate your identity with the African community? How, exactly, do you go about making it clear to people that they should not take you at face (color of skin) value? Is integration possible at all? How much integration is possible?

As is the case with most exchange students, I had come to Kenya for a year because I had a strong motivation to learn something about the African culture and heritage. Thus, the question "Whose side are you on?" was answered from the beginning. The circumstances of my homestay made it possible for me to follow through on my motivation. I was placed in an African host family in Nairobi, but spent most of my year in an African girls' boarding school 300 kilometers Northwest of Nairobi, in a town called Eldoret. Through a close friend, Sarah, who came from a rural area, I received a fine introduction to the customs of her tribe and of that region of Kenya. Concerning the second question, "How far do you want to go . . . ?," I tried to go as far as I could using whatever means possible to demonstrate my identity with the African community. Of course, I never said or implied (as is so common in the white community) that I was proud of being a European. During my stay, I became so repelled by the whites in Kenya that eventually I found myself saying more or less the opposite: I began to describe Danes and Denmark in the third person. Instead of saying, for instance, "Yes, we eat a lot of potatoes in Denmark," I would say, "Yes, they eat a lot of potatoes in Denmark."

Language is an important factor in identifying yourself with one community or the other. The English spoken in the African community has a particular accent and virtually isn't heard in the white community. So I did everything I could to make my accent as Kenyan as possible, and I enlarged my vocabulary with Swahili words and syntaxes. Also, I sometimes mentioned the tribal names that I had been given, which were Chepkius ("born too early") in the Kalenjin tribe, and Adhiambo ("born in the afternoon") in the Luo tribe.

My African friends also helped me out, for instance, by introducing me by saying, "This is Julia; she comes from Denmark, but she's African."

Perhaps what really gives you away is the way you fit into the environment. People notice how you travel, whom you're with, whether you look comfortable or disgusted with what is going on around you as you walk the street. It helps also to do things that definitely are never done by Europeans. I caused a great deal of amusement by balancing my basket on

my head, by carrying African children on my back, by washing and harvesting along with other Africans. Dancing traditional dances also raised an eyebrow or two.

My friend Sarah and I once went to visit some people in her home area in the Kenyan highlands. When we arrived, I did everything the same as she in order to make sure that I was acting correctly. When I gave my hand to an elderly lady, the grandmother of the house, something unexpected happened. As is the custom in her tribe, I had put my left hand on my right wrist while greeting her to show her my respect. Apparently, she had not expected this gesture. She started to cry, and she shook my hand up and down for a long time. It was wonderful to be able to return to her a little of the self-respect that others had stolen from her. And it was ever so evil to begin to conceive how big this theft had been.

It took a while before my classmates at school understood that I was truly interested in learning about their backgrounds. I still remember very clearly the night when Sarah looked at me and said, "No, I don't like the whites, and especially not the British. But you're O.K." This occurred after I had been at school four months; it was the beginning of something fantastic. For she finally had understood that I wanted to get to know her culture, that I wanted to become part of her community, that I did not regard her or her community as inferior. I had chosen which side I was on, and my choice had been recognized.

One day I was walking with a basket on my head in the residential area of Nairobi where my host family lived. Some African women were sitting on the sidewalk, and they greeted me as I passed.

"Where are you going?" they asked.

"I am going to the house of Onyango," I replied in Swahili.

They laughed. "But where do you live?" they asked.

"In the house of Onyango."

They laughed again and explained very kindly that perhaps my Swahili wasn't doing so well. A person like me wouldn't want to say that she lived in the house of Onyango.

"My Swahili is doing just fine," I explained. "I live with the Onyango family. I have not been living there for a while because I've been away at boarding school."

But they never did believe me. From their point of view, what I had described was not possible. White girls just do not live with black families!

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The confrontation was always there -- in the bus, on the street, in the teahouse, at home in the kitchen. I never really got used to people staring at me, to little children reaching out to touch my hair. I realized that I could never disappear in a crowd. I recognized that a situation never would occur in which people automatically knew what I stood for and why I was in Kenya. On the other hand, I found that I could get very far with a few personal relationships in which I was accepted as a person more than as a mzungu (white). And I learned how to make people quickly aware that perhaps they ought to have a closer look, that perhaps I was different from most other whites. Most Africans initially were skeptical of me, just as I learned to be skeptical of other whites . . . unless they were able to show me that they were not as the majority of Kenyan whites. (The first time you encounter a typical Kenyan white, you may get a shock. Perhaps he asks you whether you prefer your first drink before or after the sun has gone down -- as a Daniksh development volunteer asked me as the very first question when I met her on a train -- or, worst of all, he is likely to start explaining how difficult working with Africans can be.) I have white friends from Kenya, and I have very warm feelings toward them. Perhaps I have white Kenyan friends because I quickly learned to distinguish between the two categories of whites, and to slip away from the more repulsive characters. There were limits to what I could accept hearing my African friends being described as.

No, I couldn't claim to be African. It's not possible to completely avoid the consequences of being white in a country such as Kenya. It's not possible to leap all the way over the enormous cultural barrier. On the other hand, there's a world of difference between living in the white community with its as-European-as-possible-despite-the-setting strategy, and the extent of integration into the African community that is possible for the individual non-African. In this context it is worth mentioning that a platform of equal terms is a good basis to go from. And this is exactly what an AFS experience usually provides you with -- some measure of equal terms with your immediate surroundings. Trying to integrate yourself into the African community means having a go at breaking down the wall between the two communities. This could also be called making a contribution to the fight against prejudice and racism -- which is completely in accordance with the goals of AFS.

What also has to be understood, however, is that such an opportunity may be more or less wasted if the sponsoring organization does not provide the students with the necessary conceptual tools to get the experience into perspective, and does not help them use the experience to reach beyond their own minds. It has to be recognized that exchanges are not the ends but the means. I feel that the ends are not only awareness but also active participation and dedication to solve the problems that are recognized during the exchange experience.

Working for peace by way of exchanges is a brilliant idea, but why not utilize it fully? It's like sowing a wheat field without looking after it -- and then claiming that you've made a major contribution to solving the world's food shortage. Some wheat will grow on a neglected field, but only enough for the farmer himself. We should be reaching further. This is why orientation and support of participants by the exchange organization is of great importance, not only before the exchange takes place but also during the experience in the host country and after the return home.

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Living with two different cultures is, to some extent, like living with two different personalities. You have to live in one at a time. That creates certain problems when you switch from one to the other, at least the first few times you do it. I became different after I'd been in Kenya for a while. And I was different -- and in emotional distress -- when I returned to Denmark.

Some years earlier I had returned to Denmark from a one-year stay in Canada. During that sojourn I had attended a Canadian school and had made Canadian friends, but I'd found it rather easy to maintain my nationality and culture in the new surroundings. I'd felt influenced by the new culture, but experienced no major conflict between the two. Coming home to Denmark wasn't much of a problem. I had to make some readjustments to the Danish way of life. I had to get used to people growing tired of listening to my stories and impressions about Canada. But the ways in which I had changed were rather harmless, being limited to my having grown up a bit as a result of seeing that there are other ways of living, having friends from a different cultural background, and coping with a new language. But by the time I was ready to leave Kenya, my norms and behavior actually had changed. Leaving Kenya was like tearing a piece of my heart out. Of course, you lose a piece of your heart here and there as you go through life; that is to be expected. But this piece was too big for comfort. I could not simply recover and walk away smiling, as I had done in the case of my return from Canada. I could not work things out for myself by sharing stories and impressions about Kenya with others. The fact is that I did not talk very much about Kenya because I did not feel capable of explaining to other Danes what Kenya actually was like. The difference between the two worlds was so enormous that the task seemed impossible.

About three and a half months after I returned from Kenya, on May 1st, 1980, I was standing in Faelledparken, the big park that has served as the meeting ground on every international labor day for hundreds and thousands of Danes. Suddenly, I knew that my roots and my future lay in Denmark. I realized that I would have to find my original Danish identity if my life was to make any sense. But I also recognized that my Kenyan experience

was still an open book, one with chapters still unfinished. I could not simply close that book and put it on the shelf. I could not simply return from Kenya and take up my Danish identity, like an item of clothing left behind.

Had I not been the first non-American AFSer to go to Kenya, perhaps I would have had someone to talk things over with. Had there been other Danes or Europeans who had gone through similar experiences, I would have had someone who was in a position to understand the feelings I was trying to cope with. Had the Danish AFS organization at that time had a re-orientation for students returning from the Southern hemisphere, I probably would have benefitted from attending. And had the experience not been so emotionally involving, my feelings, thoughts, and experiences after returning might not have mattered so much.

Coming home to Denmark from Kenya required two and a half years -- and a return trip to Kenya. For I was in need of something that could help me understand what had happened to me during my year there. Which changes in me were due to my becoming older, and which were due to my experience in Kenya? Which features of my personality pre-dated my AFS year, and which were a consequence of that year? Which feelings while I was in Kenya had to do with Kenya, and which had to do with my being 16 years old? Very important also was my dream about making a contribution to the cultural dimension of the North-South dialogue, and to the eradication of racism. More specifically, I was concerned about what Danish development aid actually was achieving in the Third World. For even though I had met some sensible development workers in Kenya, the number of good-for-nothing ones I'd met had made me feel that it was actually the development agencies of the "developed" world that needed the development aid! I was deeply troubled about the cultural insensitivity of these agencies, about their general clumsiness, and about their aiming for targets other than beneficial effects in the receiving countries. I wanted to speak up about these problems, to write about them, to get something moving. But I could not. I, who had written so much and had spoken so often, was left quiet and unable to get across to others even the simplest message. I felt an obligation to AFS, to my host family, to my African friends; I felt I should be able to get something done. Working in the North-South dialogue group in the Danish AFS organization was helpful in terms of getting some political aspects clarified, but there were still many emotions, experiences, and opinions that were left untouched. My fingers got stuck on the typewriter keys, and I became close to tears when I tried to talk to my Danish friends about Kenya. What I lacked was a balanced emotional relationship to my experience. What I could not do was to organize my feelings and knowledge in a structured and rational manner.

I had only myself to discuss these things with. I had to return to Kenya before I could use my first experience there in a constructive way.

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It is 4:30 in the morning. I am sitting, waiting in the dimly lit Nairobi airport. Laura, also a former AFS student, is with me. For both of us a dream has come true. She also seems to have lost a piece of her heart during her stay here in Kenya three years ago. Laura is an American; she joined me in Copenhagen so that we could come together.

At dawn, a small figure cuddled up in an overcoat comes toward us. It is my friend Sarah. She has come all the way from the school where she's teaching to meet us — it is a trip that takes the better part of the night. And we have to return with her straightaway since she has only one day off. It is absolutely wonderful to see her alive and well!

We wait for daylight and manage to get into Nairobi. The colors around us are an explosion. Flowers, clothes, people — the smells and sounds are new and yet so familiar.

I pass by the office of my former host father and say a quick hello before we catch a bus to Eldoret. The three of us get a seat near the driver . . . something we soon reconsider the wiseness of. The driver is quite reckless, and as we pass through the large Rift Valley Escarpment we're all a bit nervous. I wonder whether we actually will make it to our destination. Suddenly, a feeling I had three years ago comes back. Life can end quite suddenly with no prior notice. It's a feeling that occurs when you discover that, should something go amiss, help will not necessarily be just around the corner. There is no telephone booth 200 meters away. You cannot dial 000 or any other three digit number and expect the health system to come to pick you up, providing all you need free of charge. Many of the vehicles used for public transportation in Kenya could break down under circumstances that would mean the end of this story. And I recall my discovery, three years earlier, that in Kenya you depend upon friends and family in times of need, whereas in Denmark you lean on your rights in relation to society. In Denmark you are responsible for yourself, your children, and your various belongings; almost all other responsibilities belong to numerous institutions under the wings of Mother Denmark, also known as the Welfare Society. When people become old, there are institutions where they can stay. If one is an unwed mother, she can obtain financial support from the state -- just as students, the unemployed, and retired people do. But in Kenya, the elderly are taken care of by their family, as are the children of mothers who must finish their education. Students, the unemployed, and the retired all are dependent upon friends and family for financial support.

I feel strongly aware that I have learned something important about friendship, about family membership. I have seen what it means to be responsible for another person in a community where you cannot leave any part of that responsibility to an institution.

As we sit in the bus, rain starts pouring down all around us. The muddy road grows sticky; many buses are stuck in the mud already. We must reach Eldoret before nightfall in order to catch another bus onwards. Will we make it? Tropical rain means business: It comes in torrents, soaks instantly anyone in its path, and turns the sky into a depressing gray blanket. But it finally subsides and, despite a few additional stops and problems, we arrive in Eldoret just before dusk. We run down the road towards Kapsabet and just barely are able to catch a matatu needing a few more passangers. (Matatu is the name for a small van with two benches and a roof often made of canvas. A loudspeaker playing Swahili music also belongs in a proper matatu. These are privately owned vehicles; the owner usually employs a driver and a conductor to run them. These vans are relatively cheap and travel to all areas, even those that are not very densely populated.)

We leave the matatu at the small town where Sarah teaches at secondary school; there are a few small shops and a post office. This area of Kenya is very green and fertile. As we near Sarah's house, a small child of about 5 comes running towards me and jumps right into my arms, compelling me to drop all the things I am carrying. She is the daughter of the teacher with whom Sarah shares the house. Seldom have I seen a child as happy and outgoing. Because of the rain and cold, Sarah starts to prepare dinner at the jiko, a small, portable charcoal stove. Even though it is quite late and we all are very tired, it is wonderful just to sit around the kerosene lamp and talk. Chepchumba, the little girl, sits on my lap and we chat a little about this and that -- it matters not that I am unable to understand her as she is speaking the tribal language.

The next day we take Laura to Kapsabet by matatu, and there we part with her and return. In Kenya, it is the custom to accompany your guest at least part of the way home. Laura's former host family lives in Kendu Bay, south of Lake Victoria, so she has a long way to travel.

I have been looking forward very much to seeing Sarah's family again. They have some land with two houses a few kilometers from the town where Sarah teaches. One of their houses is for Sarah and her parents, and one is for her brothers. (When the oldest boy in a family comes of age, he builds a house for himself and his younger brothers; the boys all stay there until they found their own families. Girls remain in their parents' house until they marry.) As Sarah is the only girl, she and I have quite a lot of space to ourselves. The mud-walled house and everything around it are marvelous examples of using materials that are at hand.

It is a fantastic feeling to sit in the smoky kitchen of Sarah's house once more, with the tea boiling over in the fireplace, the flames casting a soft glow throughout the room, the eyes of the others glistening in the near darkness. I smell the tea and burning firewood. I hear the small-talk of the others against a background of the rain upon the roof. I recall that tea in Kenya is made by heating milk and water together in almost equal parts, then adding tea leaves and quite a bit of sugar as it starts to boil. This is woman's work. It seems that the older the boys grow, the more they hesitate at the threshold of the kitchen. This sort of world, where only one of the sexes can take part, was new to me the first time I came to Kenya. But I like the intimacy and security it conveys -- it is the intimacy and security that comes from being a member of a defined group working together to accomplish a defined task.

After staying with Sarah for three weeks, I leave her to visit Laura's host family in Kendu Bay. Sarah accompanies me all the way to Kisumu, a town on the shores of Lake Victoria. We find the bus to Kendu Bay and I'm off on my five-hour trip. As usual, there are many people on the bus. Some are nicely dressed -- they are probably on leave from a job in one of the cities, and are going home to see their families. Some are going to market with their vegetables or chickens, many with children in their lap or wrapped up in a bundle on an arm.

When we arrive in Kendu Bay, I am surprised not to be greeted by Laura. Some time passes and she still is not there, so I sit down and wait. In Kenya one learns that things do not happen on schedule, and that sitting down to ponder life for a while isn't all that harmful after all. Presently, a boy approaches me and hands me a note. It's from Laura. She will not be here today but will come tomorrow. I am to follow the boy to the house.

We reach the house after a long walk, and I spend the rest of the afternoon being entertained by various other guests since neither Laura nor her host father are home. I notice the small, mud-walled living room, and the corner for Laura's bed that is separated by a wall and a piece of cloth from her host parents' bedroom. When Joram, Laura's host father, arrives after dusk, I am very happy to see him again. He explains that Laura went to see his sister and her newborn child; she will not return before tomorrow. In Kenya it is not proper to leave a house that you have come to visit without staying for at least one meal. If you have been away for a long time, you must stay for a while. So I understand why Laura will not be able to return before tomorrow. And I am reminded of the difficulty I had caused three years earlier when I first visited the houses of others; in Denmark it is polite to refuse dinner if you do not know the family well.

Laura returns the next day. That evening Joram, Laura, and I discuss many things. Joram is very interested to hear about the Danish school

system, about gas stoves in Denmark, and about Danish things in general. He compares what I tell him with what Laura has told him about the United States. He seems a bit skeptical. How difficult it must be for him to conceive of these different worlds, which we can show him using only words. After a while our conversation drifts back to the time of Laura's arrival three years earlier. Joram says he could not understand Laura's American accent for the first three months. He recalls how she cried when she saw the mud huts that were to be her home for a year, not to mention the time she saw her first cockroach crawling up the wall by her bed! But I have seen Laura walking around the community, greeting people and having little chats in Luo, the local language. Anyone can see that she is accepted and loved. I know that she has returned to this mud-walled house because she feels at home here.

Laura and I go to bed, taking with us the small kerosene lamp that someone has fashioned from a tin can. We've shared this soggy bed before, so we know that we will have to lie back-to-back in the middle. But we've become quite adept at falling asleep in a fixed position. Sharing a bed is something one gets used to in Kenya; in many houses there are not as many beds as there are people. But it's not a bad thing to do if it's cold or if you happen to be a little girl who's just started out in boarding school and would rather sleep close to your best friend.

When I wake up, Laura already is up and cleaning the dishes; she brings me some water to wash in. It is not all that clean, being from a waterhole two kilometers away. In fact, if you stick your little finger halfway into it, the nail will not be visible. Drinking water comes from a barrel that collects rainwater from the roof. Water is precious here, for this region is very dry. It has little wealth from nature's hand, and has not been fortunate either as far a development money is concerned. It is proving very difficult to move the region out of poverty, as the various problems of education, health, and nutrition seem to influence each other negatively.

At the end of the week, Sarah comes down to Kendu Bay so that all three of us can travel East. Getting up at 4:00 in the morning, we walk down the main road and reach our destination by dawn at 6:30. Laura and I are going to see a friend in the coastal town of Mombasa; Sarah is going home to teach. After traveling for a day, we reach Nakuru where we catch the midnight train to Nairobi. We travel third class, which is open to anyone who wishes to ride. As usual, it is quite crowded and we are lucky to get two seats -- but only because we put one child to sleep on my backpack and another one in my lap. It strikes me that I could not have been content with this arrangement when I had first arrived in Kenya three years ago. First of all, I would have been too anxious and uncertain to dare to take an initiative such as inviting a stranger's child into my lap. Most importatn, though, is that one just does not do such things in Denmark. In Kenya, however, it is accepted and expected by parents and children alike that fellow passengers will hold children in a crowded bus,

matatu, or train. Children are a common responsibility. I can just imagine myself on a Copenhagen bus taking a child from a parent and saying, 'That's all right; I'll hold her." The parent would very likely be quite flabbergasted.

Both Sarah and I get malaria after staying in Kendu Bay. It is treated here with the same seriousness as the flu is treated in Denmark. There are many things that are treated very seriously in Denmark, but treated much more tolerantly in Kenya: for example, time -- schedules, deadlines, whether you can spend an hour talking over a cup of tea. Worrying about fewer things and about different things has been a very important lesson for me. After all, does it really make sense to get a peptic ulcer from worrying about the deadline for submitting a manuscript for the Occasional Papers in Intercultural Learning? After all, if you and your family are well and have enough to eat, who's complaining?

Laura and I have a quiet evening on the train to Mombasa. We talk about our feelings upon returning to Kenya and chat about old times. It seems that, for both of us, our year in Kenya was incomplete without this trip back. So many threads were left hanging when, all of a sudden, we had been put on a plane back to where we'd come from.

It would not have been possible for me to return to Kenya with anyone else but Laura. There are Danish friends of mine with whom I'd travel to Europe or North America any time, but not to Kenya. I would have been pulled apart trying to be both Danish and Kenyan. Another Dane would have witnessed the strangest changes occurring in me, and probably would have neither understood nor readily accepted them.

Of course, a stay with my former host family in Nairobi is just the right way to bring this journey to a close. It is marvelous to see them again. Soon the day comes when it is time to pack and pick up Laura (who had gone back to Kendu Bay). I feel that six weeks have been sufficient to see the most important people again, but not so long that my attachment to them is too great. Had I stayed longer, I might not have left. But as it is, I must stay in Denmark for a time now. I must live with the people I know there. I must finish medical school. I must work for the things I believe in.

But there always will be a little bit of Kenya in me somewhere.

I was aware that in bringing me home, my friend was putting a lot on the line, not least important of which was "face," or pride. If I conducted myself correctly, his "face" would be enhanced; on the other hand, if I did not behave properly, he would lose face in the eyes of his friends and family, and that would be intolerable. Our life together had been a series of compromises, a tug-of-war between East and West. In private, we had come to certain understandings that were more or less equal. But when it came to friends and family, it was necessary for me to play my adopted role . . . for the sake of the pervasive, elusive, all-important "face."

As our trip South was coming to an end, I mulled over the literature I'd read about Chinese mothers-in-law -- about their severity, their exactitude, their demanding natures. I had been warned that this especially held true for the Taiwanese peasants who clung to tradition more fiercely than their cosmopolitan counterparts. Respect for elders was strictly adhered to, and that included the name you called someone: An older man is "old man," an older brother is "elder brother"; calling someone older by name is forbidden. I was, of course, not a formal daughter-in-law, but having lived with my friend already for a while, I was a de facto part of the official family. The relatives' attitudes were confused on this point. Not being married, thus having no obligations of loyalty to their family, I was exempt from certain things, presumably; but being in the wifely role of mistress of my friend's house, I had duties to him and his family that were implicitly understood, although ill-defined.

Elder brother and sister-in-law already had arrived as we drove up. Mama and Papa were nowhere to be seen, and when they finally did come to the door, our welcome was brief and unemotional. A nod of the head and a pat on the shoulder for their son, a glance at me were our only greetings. As we unpacked the car, the neighbor's children spotted us and soon were hanging on my heels. They stared at me, trying out a few heavily accented "hellos."

The house was typically Chinese. It was divided into several wings, unconnected and built at ninety degree angles, forming a U-shape with a courtyard in the middle. The ancestor worshipping room was the ante-room, but it was evident from the well-trodden dirt floors that the centers of activity were the courtyard and the kitchen/dining room. My friend and I were assigned a wing with wooden floors. We walked into the courtyard and he instructed me to put our belongings away.

As I walked out of the small cottage, the neighbor's children had ceased saying "hello" and were now laughing, yelling something that sounded like "a-doka." My friend's mother was standing in the middle of the courtyard, mouth agape, staring at me. My friend looked embarrassed. I had forgotten to remove my shoes. I had tracked dirt into the house, and now that it was close to New Year's Eve, we could not sweep the dirt

out of the door for fear of inadvertantly sweeping the good luck out along with it. At the same time, though, to start out the new year with a dirty house was not at all proper. Much time had been expended cleaning the place from top to bottom in the few days before our arrival.

By this time, the town's children had gathered, straining at the door to see the "A-doka." "A-doka! A-doka!" they yelled, at times in unison. They scrambled over each other for a better view, competing with one another for the most attention. As the mob grew, the family's distress increased. The whole house was soon surrounded with children looking in through any chink in the wall. The word had spread fast that there was an "A-doka" in the village, a real one like those on television.

As I ventured several "hellos," I threw them into deeper fits of laughter. I rushed back indoors (removing my shoes this time). Slowly, the voices died down and only the sound of the mortified family, tense now, discussing something, remained. My friend came in to explain: "Dok" in Taiwanese dialect means "sharp," thus "a-doka" means "sharp one." I needed further elucidation. What was sharp? To what were they referring? As my friend considerately held a mirror to my face and asked me to examine it, it dawned upon me that my nose, although of no remarkable size in the West, is naturally bigger, longer, and pointier than those of the Chinese. Here in the countryside, even had I spoken Taiwanese, it would not have helped. People evaluate others on looks, and as I was different, I was ridiculed and taunted.

Family preparations continued despite the turmoil. People ran in and out of the courtyard, delivering produce, or coming for visits to drink a cup of tepid tea on the pretext of wishing the family a happy new year. Being the youngest of the family (that is, the "wife" of the youngest son), I was expected to serve the tea and sweets to the guests, who were visibly amused. I shuffled back and forth, from kitchen to courtyard to living room with pots of freshly brewed tea and refills of sunflower seeds, peanuts, and candy for the guests. As each guest left, the hulls of the seeds had to be carefully swept into the corner (but never outside) from the places where they had been randomly thrown. I caught smells of many different foods emanating from the kitchen on every trip back, but the cooking was not something I could be trusted with. In the intervals between serving people and preparing for more to come there was little to do, and I stayed in the quarters to which my friend (who had mysteriously disappeared) and I had been assigned. The TV was turned on for the entertainment of all, but no one had time to watch. After some time of inactivity, I decided to venture out again to help in any small chore deemed suitable for me.

There were many things happening. The table had to be set; the ancestral tablets had to be arranged properly; the worshipping table had to be laden with offerings to the gods; the picture of the kitchen god had

to be sent up to heaven to report on the family; the celebratory dinner had to be finished; and the red strips of paper --"spring couplets" -- wishing for luck, prosperity, and longevity had to be pasted around doorways and window sills. I was eager to participate in any one, or all, of these activities and went around to each person in charge requesting a chance to help. Everyone refused, telling me to relax, watch TV, take it easy, rest for the strain of the next few days. No, there was nothing I could do. And those children! Whenever I reappeared, the chorus of "A-doka, hello" began all over.

Finally, a younger cousin agreed to let me follow him around with the paste for the spring couplets. Each couplet consists of four characters, either lines from well known poems or sayings, or lines designed to bring the family an attribute that had been conspicuously missing the year before. There was a certain order -- those couplets pasted on the right and on the left of doors or windows could not be reversed for fear of confusing the gods for whom they were intended. As we walked from window to doorway, I read each couplet out loud and asked for explanations. Most were written in classical Chinese, a very stylized language no longer spoken. The cousin was patient and kind in his explanations, although at times he feigned anger at my inquisitiveness in an attempt to hide his ignorance of the implications of a particular message. One-word characters denoting peace, prosperity, longevity, happiness, and luck had to be pasted inside the house. Again, each had its proper place and significance. Longevity went in the parents' bedroom, prosperity in the ancestral worshipping room, and so forth. These had to be pasted on the walls upside-down to fool the devils who then are not able to read them.

Dinner time approached and the family assembled outside for the offerings to the gods. Paper money was burned so as to provide the ancestors with funds for the year to come. Each of us took three sticks of incense cupped in our two hands and bowed three times to the ancestors, and then three times to the elders of the family in a show of profound respect. I was the last of all to perform this ritual and I was a little too fast. The beginning of my bow to the ancestors coincided with the end of my friend's bow to his parents. There was a low gasp and I stopped in mid-bow. In old customs, men and women were married simply by bowing three times to the elders and the ancestors in unison. Although this custom is now only one component of modern marriages, by bowing together with my friend I appeared to have initiated the process of matrimony. It was smoothed over. We carried the offerings back into the house for our meal.

The atmosphere of the dinner was congenial. Custom dictates that there be one dish each of chicken, beef, pork, and many dishes of vegetables, rice, and rice cakes. It is also essential to have a vegetable called "long vegetable" to symbolize longevity. Everyone eats a little of every meat dish, a symbolic gesture that the year to come will be a year of plenty. Conspicuously, there was a cooked fish in the middle

of the table as well. Nobody seemed to be eating it and I decided to taste it. My chopsticks in mid-air with a little piece of fish snatched between them, I realized that I had done something wrong. In Taiwanese custom, it seems, the fish should make it intact into the first day of the new year. This indicates the continuity of the years, the carrying over of good things from one year to the next. Having destroyed the fish's completeness, I was preventing it from bringing into the new year those things that should not be left behind. The family was appalled, but preserved an outer calm.

Dinner was finally over and I was left with the dishes and general clearning up. Everyone else went into the other part of the house to relax and chat as I slaved over the sink cleansing the oily remainders off the bowls.

As midnight approached, the children became fidgety. The distribution of the red envelopes, the highlight of the festivities, was approaching. The elders of the family give each young member a red envelope containing money to start off the new year. Most parents take this money and save it for their children -- in the old days for the dowry or bride-price, but in modern times for educational expenses or unforeseen troubles. Most children are allowed to use a small part of the money for candy. Mama and Papa initiated the giving, and first the small children accepted their envelopes with both hands in front of them, bowing when taking it. Then red envelopes were given to my friend, to me, to Elder Brother and Sister-in-law with their baby, to the cousins, and so on. The Elder Brother distributed his envelopes in filial piety to his parents, and to all younger than he. And my friend did the same. By the end of the little ceremony, I had many little red envelopes filled with money. Naturally, the amount of money is symbolic only, but the very fact of having accepted them (though it was impossible to refuse) somehow wedded me to the family and imposed upon me the same expectations as those of a daughter-in-law. This red envelope ceremony was a time of unity for the members of the family. It ended just as mid-night struck and firecrackers went off all around us. The usually restrained family broke into huge smiles, bowing and patting each other on the shoulders emotionally.

With my friend's warning in mind, I woke up early the next morning and got straight out of bed to begin the new day. I threw on the same clothing that I had worn the day before and went out to do my chores, not too clear about what they involved. He had said to wash the dirty clothing, but we had been there just one evening and there was nothing dirty to wash except two pairs of underwear and two pairs of socks. I brought these out with me and went to the hose and wooden scrubbing board used for laundering. Having finished this in no time at all and hung the wet wash on the available line, I went in search of Mama. When I found her hard at work in the kitchen, I knew she already had been up for several hours. I offered to help, but when put to work washing and chopping vegetables for the day's consumption, she and I both realized

that I did not know what to do with them. Every step involved her showing me the correct way of handling things and it was much easier for her to do it alone. Mama was dressed in a new suit of clothing and was eyeing my obviously worn clothes suspiciously. Through a series of hand signals, broken Mandarin, and a flood of Taiwanese dialect, she made me understand that she was displeased. I backed out of the kitchen. Papa, in the courtyard reading the newspaper, was similarly clothed in a fresh suit. As I walked out, he stared from me to the line of underwear and socks I had arranged in the far corner of the yard. He accosted me with a stream of dialect, punctuated here and there with a few words of Mandarin. It was clear that he spoke of something concerning the clothing, but what he wanted was a mystery.

Elder Sister-in-law came to my rescue. She instructed me to move my underwear and socks to the room I'd slept in, but to leave my friend's things hanging where they were. As it was a beautiful, sunny day, this seemed ludicrous. But she explained that in Taiwanese custom a woman's underwear could never be hung up in public view at a level under which someone could pass. It was considered exceedingly bad luck, a symbol of subjugation, to walk beneath a women's underthings. It could stunt your growth as well. One should not walk under a man's underwear either, but the consequences of inadvertantly doing so are not considered so severe. I removed the offending articles and put them in the dark house (where they dried three days later).

Returning to the kitchen, I set the table for breakfast. It was still only fifteen minutes after I had arisen, and already I had nothing left to do. I wandered from kitchen to courtyard and back in search of activity. I knew my friend would not be rising for a long time, and breakfast would not be served until everyone was up. I brought out my book and, sitting in the sun, began to read. Sister-in-law was very busy; Mama was running back and forth in constant motion; even Papa was busy fixing a chair and feeding the chickens that lived in and around the courtyard. Mama came over and looked at me, staring. I snapped the book shut and stood up, ready to help. She walked away without a word. I inquired of Sister-in-law if I could help. She brushed me away, scrubbing hard at the diapers of her four-month-old baby.

Finally the family was up. My friend, on seeing me in my clothing of the previous day, angrily instructed me to change into another outfit. "It is proper to meet the new year with new clothes, or at least with clean clothes. It is very insulting to wear old clothes. It means you are too poor to buy new ones and since you are living at my family's house now, you reflect badly on us." I went to change. Then we all ate breakfast together: noodles with bean sprouts and soy sauce, cabbage soup, rice porridge, peanuts, seaweed, and left-overs from the dinner of the night before. Soon after the meal was over and I had cleaned up, the rounds of visiting began. Elder Brother and my friend both walked away to the car and prepared to leave. I followed but was told that I should stay

home with the women. I adamantly refused, insisting on going along in the interests of discovering "the real Chinese New Year." My friend told me that women were not traditionally allowed out on the first day, but since I coviously was not Chinese and society was a little more modern now, he would allow me to go along.

The day was filled with short stops at various friends' and relatives' houses. The visits consisted of clasping hands together, congratulating everyone on the new year, politely sipping tea and eating some sweets, distributing red envelopes to the children of the house (who always seemed in great abundance), again bowing and clasping hands, and leaving. This ceremony was repeated innumerable times. Because I could not speak or understand a word of what was being said, I was reduced to sitting up straight, smiling a lot at everyone present, and drinking massive quantities of weak tea.

The day finally came to a close and I was actually looking forward to going back to the house. But instead of heading back, my friend and his brother decided to play mahjong, a gambling game played with tiles by four people seated around a table. I already was familiar with the game and realized that once begun, it was likely to continue all night. I argued vociferously against this, but was stifled immediately by icy stares from both my friend and his brother. It was, afterall, I who had insisted on coming along!

The game began. I sat at my friend's elbow, at first taking an interest, trying to learn the intricacies of the plays, and later looking on in silence. The TV had been shut off early to provide the right sort of atmosphere for serious mahjong play. The tea ran out and all eyes went to me. Grateful for something to do, I went in search of a stove and tea kettle to replenish the cups. Thereafter, I was expected to keep a hawk's eye out for any unfilled cups, and to refill them to the brim immediately. The men got hungry. I was expected to look for food to fill their stomachs. The other women of the house already had retired to bed and thus I found myself well into the second day of the new year in a strange kitchen frying rice for the gamblers.

The game finally came to a conclusion eight hours after it had begun. We went home and an hour later it was time to get up and begin the next day's events. My friend slept as I dragged myself out of bed once more to wash the two pairs of underwear and the two pairs of socks, to set the table, and to sit and wait for something to happen.

Mama decided that she wanted to go to a famous temple to pray on the second day. Apparently she felt anxious about some financial matters and wanted to consult the gods about a decision she needed to make. The temple was at quite a distance from the house and it would require two

cars to transport the whole family there. After a late breakfast, we all piled into the cars and started on our way.

The roads were crowded with people who were out to enjoy the first few days of sunny weather. As we drove up a winding mountain road, my friend's car started pulling away quickly from his brother's. We stopped on the side to wait for the others to catch up. Opening the door on my side the get out and stretch, I stepped into a wad of money. I decided to share it among all of us in the car, including the children.

Brother's car caught up with us and we continued on our way. When we arrived at the temple, Mama immediately disappeared to consult with her gods, and the rest of us were left to amuse ourselves. The day was pleasant, the surrounding mountains beautiful. Soon we all had gone our separate ways: I and my friend having a leisurely walk, Elder Sister-in-law and Elder Brother sitting in the shade, the children running wild. After some time had passed, we all gathered under a shade tree, waiting for Mama to reappear. When she did, a big commotion erupted. Mama was seriously upset. The children had waved their money at her and recounted the story of its discovery. It was a sign, said Mama. It was an indication that the family would be prosperous, but the money had to be given to the gods as an offering. She took the money from the children's hands and demanded that each one of us give up our money as well. Although I was not adverse to giving her my share, the children were crying and screaming and everyone had become extremely disgruntled. Eventually the money was collected and Mama went off again with her offering. She came back very pleased. For the remainder of that day, she looked upon me somewhat more favorably.

The third day of the new year started off differently for me. I elected not to get up early. Mama was incensed. She complained to my friend that I was lazy, unworthy, and definitely in need of strict training. Her attitude changed from restrained warmth to obvious coolness. Suddenly, my friend's sister and her family showed up. In true Chinese tradition, the sister had spent her festival with her husband's parents and had been allowed to visit her own parents on the third day. Elder Brother and Sister-in-law already had left for the in-law's house earlier that morning.

I rushed to get tea and sweets and, for the children, the manditory red envelopes; these I passed out solicitously. The visitors accepted my service without a word and launched into a long conversation with Mama, Papa, and my friend. As I sat nearby refilling tea cups and making friendly overtures to the children, the speaking dragged on incomprehensibly. There were obvious frequent references to me as at certain points all eyes turned in my direction. We had been planning an outing, but lunchtime came and went without our having set foot outdoors. Toward late afternoon, Elder Sister finally addressed me in poor Mandarin.

She warned me: "If you do not plan on marrying my brother, let him free to find someone who will. You may remain a friend of the family. We will, in fact, welcome you here at any time. But you must think of the needs of the family above your own pleasure."

Marriage!? My friend had disappeared conveniently, leaving me to deal with the question. Papa also had left. I was confronted by the women. Mama mentioned that if I wanted to marry her son, I first would have to learn much, much more about Taiwanese customs. And of course, I would have to learn to speak and understand the dialect. Elder Sister translated into Mardarin and added that although they were not happy about his marrying a foreigner, as long as the children were brought up in Taiwan to carry on the family name and tradition, they might be persuaded to accept it. Naturally, though, the best thing would be for me to leave him so that he could find a suitable mate. Was I prepared to give them an answer within a month? I tried to battle my way out by mentioning that I and my friend had not even remotely discussed marriage, but they seemed to think that was normal since, of course, it had been necessary for Mama to meet me and agree before the two of us could have any such discussions. I pleaded my youth, but they felt that if we could live together, we could certainly get married. Finally, I stalled for time and said I'd think about their proposal and talk it over with him. They were disappointed that I hadn't relinquished my claims to him, but heartened that the subject had been raised and that I was being pressured to make a decision.

The fourth day got off to a very slow start. Both of us got up close to noon, to the consternation of both Mama and Papa, not to mention the censure of Elder Brother and Sister-in-law who had returned the night before from their trip. Some of the cousins had left and the house was very much quieter. This was the day we were supposed to return to Taipei.

Where were the dragons? Where were the dances? Where were the numerous activities associated with Chinese New Year's festivities?

The early afternoon was filled with more visits from various guests and relatives; the activities of the past few days were repeated endlessly. The children of the village also made their reappearance and hung around the courtyard making remarks and following my every move. Not a farewell was said as we left, not a pat on the back, not one congratulatory message for the new year. Our only send-off was the fading screams of the children: "A-doka, A-doka, hello, hello!"

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